

Quality Assurance

Criteria and Procedures: Enquiries

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Glossary and abbreviations

Term used	Explanation
The Commissioner	The Scottish Information Commissioner
FOI	Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2012 and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004
FTE	Full time equivalent
HOE	Head of Enforcement
HOCS	Head of Corporate Services
HOPI	Head of Policy and Information
Officer	All employees of the Scottish Information Commissioner who respond to enquiries
QA	Quality Assurance

Introduction

1. The Scottish Information Commissioner (the Commissioner) has a duty to promote good practice and a power to give advice on the operation of FOI. One of the ways the Commissioner does this is by providing an enquiries service to the public and to public authorities. The Commissioner recognises the importance of good performance and quality in the delivery of this service. The service delivered must be to a defined standard which meets the needs of and, where practicable, the expectations of those who use our enquiries service.
2. The Commissioner carries out quality assurance in relation to the enquiries service. The purpose of the quality assurance is to:
 - help us achieve greater consistency across the office
 - ensure that the Enquiries Procedures are being followed and that responses to enquires are accurate
 - identify and evidence good practice that we can share and learn from (including new material for the website) and
 - inform line managers about individual performance and, if there are learning or development needs, to help us better support officers

Quality Criteria

3. Responses to enquiries are assessed against a number of set criteria, as set out in the Appendix. Each criterion refers to a particular aspect of the Enquiries Procedures which gives additional background about what is expected when responding to an enquiry.

How are assessments carried out?¹

4. At the start of each month, the Head of Corporate Services (HOCS) selects a minimum of 10 enquiries closed during the previous month. The enquiries, as far as possible, are selected at random, with the following provisos:
 - any enquiry which took over two weeks to respond should be assessed
 - the proportion of enquiries assessed per FTE officer are roughly the same throughout the year
 - the number of enquiries assessed for each officer are, as far as possible, spread evenly throughout the year.
5. HOCS, the Head of Policy and Information (HOPI) and the Head of Enforcement (HOE) are responsible for carrying out the assessments. It is the responsibility of the HOCS to allocate the enquiries to the Heads of Department.
6. As far as possible, the assessor will not have had direct involvement with the enquiry being assessed.

¹ Interim procedure in place pending full review of these procedures

7. The assessors complete the template QA form.
8. It is very important that assessments are carried out carefully and objectively. Assessors should highlight areas of good practice, so that we can all learn from them, not just practices which do not comply with the Enquiries Procedures. Where an assessor is of the view that a particular criterion has not been met, they will, wherever possible, suggest ways in which the work could have been improved.
9. Assessors carry out the assessment and complete the relevant form by the end of the calendar month. The form is sent to the officer's line manager, who will then discuss the assessment with the officer.
10. Both the officer and their line manager have five working days to provide comments to the assessor on the assessment (this timescale can be increased in the event of annual leave, etc.). This may be done verbally. Having received these comments, the assessor will have the opportunity of amending the report or of noting that the line manager and/or officer has/have commented on the report, but that the assessor believes the report should remain as it is.

Records management

11. Because the assessors will not usually be the officer's line manager (meaning the assessor will not have access to the officer's personal folder in VC), when the assessor carries out the assessment, they must save the form on their desktop.
12. When the assessor has completed the form, they will email the form as an attachment to the officer's line manager.
13. For reasons of privacy (every officer's inbox can be read by at least one other officer), the line manager will give the form to the officer in a sealed envelope or will hand the form to the officer in person. Forms must not be emailed to the officer.
14. When the form has been finalised (see 10. above), the following should happen:
 - the assessor emails the form as an attachment to the officer's line manager
 - the line manager saves the email (including the attachment) to the officer's HR-Personal folder in VC and lets the officer and the assessor know that this has been done.
 - the assessor advises the HOCS that the assessment has been carried out and that the form has been saved to the officer's HR-Personal folder in VC
 - the assessor deletes the form from their desktop.
15. The naming convention for the forms is as follows:
 - [Date] [Assessor/officer] [Name of form] [WorkPro reference]so, for example:
 - 2014 10 01 MK/PM QA Enquiries 201500223

Monitoring

16. It is the responsibility of the HOCS to ensure that assessments are being carried out in line with the timescales and processes set down in these procedures.
17. The HOCS reports every 6 months to the Quarterly Senior Management Team on the outcomes of the assessments carried out. The report is anonymous, but highlights particular areas of good practice or of concern.
18. The HOCS's report is also shared with all of the officers who respond to enquiries.
19. Line managers and officers will take account of the assessments as part of the Performance and Development Framework.

Review

20. An issues log has been set up for these procedures.
21. These procedures will be reviewed in line with the Key Documents Register.

Appendix - QA Enquiries

WorkPro reference:		Assessor:	
Enquirer:		Officer:	
Date of draft assessment		Date assessment finalised	

Aims and principles		Met? Yes/no/not applicable	Comments	Enquiries Procedures: paragraph
1	Was the response helpful and proportionate and was it correct?			5
2	Was the response made in good time?			6
3	Was the response expressed in language appropriate to the enquirer?			7
4	Did the response only deal with matters within the Commissioner's remit?			8
5	In responding, was the officer mindful of avoiding prejudice to future investigations?			9
6	If existing sources of information are available (e.g. YRTK, website), did the response refer the enquirer to those?			10
7	Did the officer signpost the enquirer to other organisations or suggest further research they could undertake for themselves?			11
Case management		Met? Yes/no/not applicable	Comments	Enquiries Procedures: paragraph
8	Was the WorkPro record created within two days (or by the end of the month, whichever is sooner)?			87
9	Was the correct Enquiries Type used?			95
10	Was the synopsis field completed appropriately?			97, 99
11	Where appropriate, was the Issues/Non-compliance tab completed properly?			104
13	Was the case closure process in line with the procedures (i.e. Outcome Code and date populated) and completed promptly			108 -112

Other comments from assessor (if any)

Comments from officer or line manager (if any)

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